

## Teens attend drug conference

Written by By Dick Mason The Observer August 22, 2012 09:59 am

The gulf between the cultures of rural and urban America is at once wide and narrow.

Six Union County teenagers, all members of the Youth Council of the Union County Safe Communities Coalition, recently gained an illuminating perspective of these differences and similarities.

The teenagers did so while attending the Community Anti Drug Coalition of America National Youth Leadership Initiative in Nashville.

A total of 1,900 youths from throughout the United States discussed their communities and the issues they are facing. The 1,900 youths included Hannah Hulse, who will be a sophomore at Cove High School this fall.

“It was a big eye opener. The different cultures are so diverse,” Hulse said.

Still, common threads are shared.

“We don’t live in the inner city, but we have some of the same problems,” Hulse said.

One of these is a well known gateway drug.

“Marijuana use is a huge issue across America,” Hulse said.

Ideas for tackling marijuana use and other drug problems were discussed at the conference, some of which the six Union County teenagers would like to see considered for Northeast Oregon. They include:

- having high school students sign a form pledging they will not use drugs and agreeing to random drug tests. These students, if they keep their pledge, would be eligible to win a college scholarship.
- having police identify areas of high drug activity and then take steps to cool off these drug hot spots. The steps might include installing visible surveillance cameras and the placement of barriers, which would make the areas hard to reach.

Hailey Hulse, Hannah’s twin sister, who also attended the conference, credits presenters at the conference with helping teenagers take a deeper look at the issue of drug abuse.

“They defined problems and had us go deeper to determine the causes and study ways to impact problems,” said Hailey Hulse, who will begin her sophomore year at Cove High School this fall.

Also representing Union County at the conference were Youth Council members Rachael Jones, who graduated from Elgin High School in May; Jenny Tracy, who graduated from La Grande High School in June; Theresa Smolkowski, who will be a sophomore at Elgin High School this fall, and Kelsey Dewey, who graduated from Imbler High School in May.

The Youth Council members were accompanied by Robin Wortman, coordinator of the Union County Safe Communities Coalition. She said the conference served a valuable purpose.

“It was a great opportunity for youth see the issues people are dealing with throughout the country.”



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